

families that are willing to maintain their farming operations is dwindling. Time after time, as I visit with families in Minnesota, I hear the common refrain, we have decided that with a good education, the young people that grew up on this farm ought to be pursuing a career in town. We do not think it is a good idea for them to try to continue farming.

As one after another of these farming units disappears, what we see is a phenomenon that is altogether too common and too distressing. It is the collapse of a rural economy and of a rural way of life.

Now, some may say that is just the way the market works. It is the wonders of the marketplace. But before I turn to a couple of things that we can do to try to respond to this and were discussed at the hearing, I would like to focus on the fact that the farm economy does not have the resiliency that some other parts of our economy have. You cannot downsize your operation quickly to respond to changing economic times. Your investment in fixed assets, land principally, but machinery is enormous. You have to use those assets.

At the same time you have risks that are phenomenal, the risk of weather, of course, is familiar to all of us, but the risk of disease, such as they have suffered in the Red River Valley, the risk of markets such as the collapse of markets in Southeast Asia, which were the promising opportunities for American agricultural exports, all of these things combine to haunt agriculture.

What is the response? Just in a couple of sentences, first, an emergency disaster package for crop insurance that is a bipartisan proposal; second, accelerating the payments coming under the Freedom to Farm Act, a partisan proposal; third, extending the marketing loan period, something we might have bipartisanship on; raising or uncapping the marketing loan program. These are a variety of things that were discussed.

I recommend or urge my colleagues to look more closely at what is happening in rural America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BEREUTER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

H.R. 4355, THE YEAR 2000 INFORMATION DISCLOSURE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the year 2000 problem, we all know that time is running out and we are competing in a race against the calendar to avert an impending computer catastrophe. This Congress is firmly committed to moving the Federal Government and private industry toward correcting the year 2000 problem in a timely and effective manner.

In order for private industry to be Y2K compliant, given the relatively brief amount of time left before the January 1, 2000, deadline, we must foster an environment for the exchange and the free flow of information among businesses. Allowing information about year 2000 solutions to be widely available can help private industry move expeditiously to correct the problem. But, unfortunately, liability concerns have made many in the private sector reluctant to exchange such information.

At the request of the President, I join today with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to sponsor H.R. 4355, the Year 2000 Information Disclosure Act. While the bill in its current form may not fully address the liability problems associated with information sharing, I believe it is important to begin the debate on addressing this issue.

As the co-chair of the House Y2K task force along with my co-chair the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN), I intend to work with the appropriate committees of jurisdiction in Congress and with the private industry to craft an effective bill which will promote the open sharing of information about year 2000 solutions.

By working together, and only by working together, we have an opportunity to effectively address the liability concerns of private industry and to encourage the sharing of important information about solutions to correct the Y2K problem.

Let us move ahead.

Mr. Speaker, I include a statement by the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Technology, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BARCIA).

Mr. BARCIA. I want to join my colleagues in introducing the Year 2000 Information Disclosure Act.

We have all read about the potential effects of the Year 2000 computer problem. The Subcommittee on Technology and the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology have been at the forefront of publicizing the nature of this problem, and have consistently pushed Agency officials to fix their computer systems. As my colleagues have already outlined the scope of the problem and the provisions of this bill, I want to focus on a few key elements.

First, I want to commend the Administration and especially Mr. John Koskinen, Assistant to the President and Chair of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion, for drafting this legislation. Although there has been much discussion regarding what actions Federal agencies should take to correct their systems, the larger private sector issue has been large-

ly ignored. This legislation is the first of several steps necessary to assist the private sector in addressing the Y2K problem in an open and constructive way.

By protecting those who share Y2K information in good faith from liability claims based on exchanges of information, this bill promotes an open and public exchange of information between companies about Y2K solutions. Throughout the Subcommittee on Technology's examination of the Year 2000 computer problem, I have continued to be surprised about the lack of hard facts. The goal of this bill is to make companies feel more secure in sharing information about this problem.

However, this is only a first step, and many important issues remain to be addressed. I believe that the most important element of any national Y2K strategy is informing consumers and small- and medium-sized businesses on how the Y2K problem could affect them. The public needs a Y2K checklist and they need to know what questions to ask. I know my colleagues on the House Y2K Task Force, Representatives HORN, KUCINICH, and MORELLA, share my concerns and I look forward to working with them to develop an appropriate strategy.

In closing, I urge the swift action on this important piece of legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MEEHAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MEEHAN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

HEALTH CARE PROPOSAL FOR SENIORS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I want to alert Members about a very disturbing proposal recently offered by the chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health. This proposal would charge senior citizens in this country an \$8 copayment for Medicare home health care visits. At present, as you know, these visits are now without cost for the patient.

Mr. Speaker, in my judgment, if this very terrible proposal were ever passed into law, and let us make sure that it is not, it would cause enormous pain and hardship for some of the weakest and most vulnerable people in this country, low income and sick elderly people. Why, in God's name, would we be making life more difficult for so many people who today are finding it difficult just to pay their bills?

Mr. Speaker, as you know, nearly half of all senior citizens in our country have incomes of less than \$15,000 a year, and about 12 percent of them live in poverty.

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Many of them today are finding it extremely difficult to pay their bills, to